

# TRANSMISSION RIGHT OF WAY TREE CLEARING AND MAINTENANCE

## A Balanced Approach to Vegetation Management

North America demands a safe, reliable electric grid and Xcel Energy's transmission lines form a significant part of the backbone of the grid. We own one of the nation's largest electric transmission systems, a nearly 17,000-mile network of high-voltage power lines that carries electricity to more than 3.3 million customers in eight states.

In an effort to safeguard the reliability of our transmission delivery system and your electric service, we have developed a vegetation management program to control the growth of trees and other vegetation around our transmission facilities and rights of way. The program attempts to balance our customers' need for reliable energy while respecting the natural environment that surrounds our facilities.

This brochure will provide you with an overview of our policies for vegetation management in our transmission rights of way, and hopefully address the majority of questions you may have about those policies.

## Federal Requirements

In August 2003, a major power outage struck the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada. Investigators determined that a tree that had come in contact with a transmission line was one of the root causes of the blackout.

As a result of that event, a new national standard with substantial penalties for non-compliance was created governing vegetation management practices for lines that are considered part of the national transmission grid. The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), under the direction of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), developed the standard, FAC-003. The standard mandates, among other requirements, that minimum clearance distances between transmission lines and the nearest vegetation must be established for each utility.

To conform to this standard and better ensure the reliability of the transmission system, we've made it a policy to eventually remove all tall-growing trees and other woody-stemmed vegetation within the rights of way of applicable power lines. However, under certain circumstances, such as those with unique topographic and/or environmentally-sensitive conditions, we may allow compatible, low-growing species to remain in the right of way. Although there is no guarantee that vegetation can remain in maintained areas (i.e. mowed yards, lawns and public areas), we do attempt to work with landowners to determine if trees and other vegetation deemed compatible with safe operation of the line may remain.

The main objective of this policy is not only to ensure compliance with the Federal standard, but also to minimize the potential for vegetation to interfere with the operation of the line.



# VEGETATION MANAGEMENT TRANSMISSION RIGHT OF WAY

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## General Policies

**Safety** — Electricity can be deadly, so that's why we have contracted with qualified line clearance arborists to perform the work. Landowners should never attempt to trim or remove tree limbs near or adjacent to any power lines. If you're concerned about a tree that appears to be too close to a power line, contact us at **800.895.4999**.

**Tree Removal** — In our efforts to comply with governmental regulation and to better ensure reliability, our transmission line vegetation management program emphasizes tree removal to promote long-term vegetation control. In many cases, this means removing trees in areas where trees have been pruned in the past.

**Tree Pruning** — In those rare cases when we find that tree removal is not possible, we will prune trees to satisfy federal standards. Pruning methods attempt to comply with standards set by the American National Standards Institute and the Tree Care Industry Association, which are endorsed by the International Society of Arboriculture. Access, terrain and tree height may necessitate the use of mechanical pruning equipment.

**Vegetation Clearing** — We employ manual and mechanized clearing where the vegetation is too tall for herbicide applications.

**Herbicide Application** — We apply herbicides to control the root systems of woody-stemmed vegetation and to reduce the cost of future maintenance. Our contractors are to use herbicides that are registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the appropriate state regulatory agency. The herbicides are applied by licensed applicators.

**Debris Cleanup** — In most cases, the debris that results from our clearing activities is left on the rights of way to naturally decompose and return nutrients to the soil and reduce the possibility of soil erosion. Our contractors will collect and dispose of any brush that falls into roadways, waterways, fences, lawns or pastures or other maintained areas.

## Working With Property Owners

While we go to great lengths to collaborate with our neighbors, there are times when a landowner may disagree with us on a specific issue. If that happens, our goal is to work diligently to resolve the problem and attempt to reach a mutually agreeable solution.

If you have a question or concern about our transmission right of way vegetation management program, please contact us at **800.895.4999**.

## Transmission Right of Way Corridor

